

WASHINGTON DC - Today, US Congressman Mike Honda, chair emeritus of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, hosted a Congressional briefing with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to discuss the release of the [Action Plan for the Prevention and Treatment of Viral Hepatitis](#)

.

At the briefing, Assistant Secretary for Health Dr. Howard Koh and the Director of the National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention, Dr. Kevin Fenton, joined Members of Congress in reiterating that the Action Plan's success is contingent upon government leadership at all levels and the active participation of communities, non-governmental organizations, health care providers, and the private sector.

"Last Congress, I introduced the Viral Hepatitis and Liver Cancer Control and Prevention Act with bi-partisan support to focus federal efforts on establishing, promoting, and supporting a comprehensive prevention, research, referral and treatment program to combat viral hepatitis," **said Rep. Honda.**

"The recommendations in this HHS Action Plan will provide critical updates to the legislation, which I'll be re-introducing later this Congress. In addition, this plan helps detail strategic investments we need to make because every day our countrymen and women are dying needlessly from a disease that is entirely preventable if detected early."

HHS's Action Plan presents robust and dynamic steps for improving the prevention of viral hepatitis and the care and treatment provided to infected persons, including steps to increase the proportion of persons who are aware of their hepatitis B and C virus infection, ways to reduce the new number of hepatitis infections, and steps to eliminate mother to child transmission.

Roughly 2 billion people worldwide have been infected with hepatitis B, more than 170 million people are chronically infected with hepatitis C, and in this nation alone, an estimated 5.3 million people are infected with either hepatitis B or hepatitis C. Left untreated, hepatitis can cause liver disease, liver cancer and premature death decades after infection. Tragically, approximately two thirds of those infected are unaware of their status.

Senator John Kerry: "This report is a blueprint that needs to be implemented through legislation to execute a comprehensive strategy to find and fight this silent killer,"

Rep. Bill Cassidy: "As a physician I understand the importance of prevention, care, and treatment of viral hepatitis. This terrible disease burdens millions of people around the globe and more needs to be done to combat its spread. Premature deaths from this disease can be

stopped. For the first time HHS has undertaken a coordinated response to combat this epidemic and provide cost effective care and prevention.”

Rep. Donna Christensen: “This silent epidemic is yet another example of a chronic condition that disproportionately and detrimentally affects racial and ethnic minorities in this country. In fact, viral hepatitis is adding to the already high burden of health disparities prevalent in both the Asian-American and African-American communities. The Viral Hepatitis Action Plan released by the Department of Health and Human Services, therefore, is a welcome addition to the ongoing efforts to eliminate all health disparities. I am very confident that this plan will provide the necessary tools to prevent, treat, and care for those individuals at risk for and suffering from this harmful health condition. As such, I applaud HHS for developing and releasing this Plan because it will move our country even closer to achieving health equity.”

Rep. Judy Chu, Chair of the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus (CAPAC): “The report outlined today from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services provides us with information on the steps we must take to reduce the spread of viral hepatitis. This report is important for the Asian Pacific American Community where hepatitis B is especially lethal. Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders make up 5.5 percent of the U.S. population, but account for more than 50 percent of chronic hepatitis B cases. And that is why the CAPAC is leading the effort to pass a health disparities bill that includes Congressman Honda’s vision of how we can improve the way viral hepatitis is diagnosed and treated. Together we can reduce the glaring disparities plaguing the Asian American and Pacific Islander Community, and prevent this silent killer from striking so many.”

Rep. Charles Dent: “The Viral Hepatitis Action Plan released today is an important step in establishing a comprehensive strategy to fight viral hepatitis. I am pleased one of the formal objectives of the plan is to increase awareness among those infected. I look forward to working with my colleagues to implement cost effective policies that will enhance screening and detection of this silent killer and improve care.”

Rep. Hank Johnson: “I am living proof that this is a winnable battle,” said Rep. Johnson, who announced in 2009 that he successfully completed treatment for hepatitis. “The costs of inaction are simply too great. That’s why this plan, the first-ever federal plan to combat this silent epidemic, is so important. Thanks to the National Viral Hepatitis Roundtable, and all the advocates, who have worked tirelessly to ensure that viral hepatitis receives the national attention it deserves.”

Rep. Barbara Lee: “Viral hepatitis is posing a serious threat to our communities, particularly our communities of color. Half of all hepatitis B infected persons in the U.S. come from the AAPI community and, as CAPAC Health Task Force Chair, I know that we have to act swiftly to eliminate this silent epidemic. That’s why today’s announcement of a first-of-its-kind action plan to combat viral hepatitis is such good news. With this plan and the coordinated efforts of the many agencies, departments and community stakeholders, we can win the fight. Now our real work begins to fully fund this action plan and, as an appropriator, I am committed to supporting this vitally important effort to wipe out hepatitis.”

To read the Department of Health and Human Services' Action Plan for the Prevention and Treatment of Viral Hepatitis, see <http://www.hhs.gov/ash/initiatives/hepatitis>.